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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000470

EUR/SCE FOR ERIN KOTHEIMER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER CHOD TELLS HIS STORY: GERDEC CLAIMS ANOTHER
VICTIM

REF: TIRANA 452

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN L. WITHERS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) The tenacity and fervor of recent political events, from the passage of controversial constitutional changes in mid-April to the June 16 voting down of five Supreme Court Justice nominees, makes little sense on the surface without an underlying motive. Rumors swirl around the capital as to what this might be, but the highest ranking officials, including Prime Minister Berisha, Speaker Topalli, and President Topi avoid such speculation, concentrating on the political fight at hand. In this increasingly heated political climate, the former Chief of Defense, Luan Hoxha, sought out the Ambassador to discuss his recent firing, his cooperation with Prosecutor General, and his view of the facts on Gerdec.

12. (C) In a June 17 meeting he had requested with the Ambassador, recently fired Chief of Defense Luan Hoxha laid out his side of the story regarding the Gerdec explosion of March 15. In contrast to former Defense Minister Fatmir Mediu's public statements, which lay the operational blame for Gerdec at the feet of the military, Hoxha asserted that from its inception former minister Mediu had made all decisions, from the choice of Gerdec as the site for this ammunition destruction, to what types of ammunition would be destroyed and on what time schedule. Hoxha asserted that his staff had been directed to transport the ammunition to the site, and to guard the site, nothing more. Hoxha said that when he visited Gerdec in mid-2007 his soldiers were carrying out these two duties, and it appeared on the surface that nothing was amiss. He charged that it was during the second half of the project, beginning in December 2007, that he was directed by Mediu, over his own stated concerns in writing to Prime Minister Berisha (copied to Speaker Topalli and Mediu), as well as following direct pressure by telephone from "a young man" who he later confirmed as Shkelzen Berisha, son of the PM, to continue to deliver higher caliber ammunition to Gerdec and do so without delay. Asked whether he had reported this information to the Prosecutor General, Hoxha answered yes, he had provided all information and documents to the PG's investigators, save the information regarding Berisha's son. On this, he said, it was not safe to speak. The Ambassador emphasized that if the PG's investigation is to be successful, those who know the truth must speak out. Hoxha agreed that in the interest of justice he should speak out, but did not confirm that he would do so. (Note: Hoxha said there are many others who know this information.)

13. (C) COMMENT: This is the second incident of an official expressing outright concern, bordering on fear, for personal and professional safety, in strict confidence to the Ambassador. (The first came from Deputy Head of the High Council of Justice Kreshnik Spahiu, Reftel.) Some outside evidence supports Hoxha's version of events. As Chief of Defense, Hoxha's relations with former Minister Mediu were always strained, and in our dealings with him he appeared to be frequently out of the loop and lacking sufficient authority to carry out the duties of his office. According to public information, the PG appears to be focusing her investigation away from the military itself and on Mediu,

possibly because that is where the evidence has led so far. If Hoxha's version contains elements of truth, it could help explain a relevant question of the day - why the PM has stepped up consistent attacks on independent institutions at this particular time, alarming the international community and leading it to question Albania's democratic credentials when much remains at stake regarding NATO ratification. End Comment.

WITHERS